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SUBJECT: U PARTY PROPOSES THIRD TERM FOR URIBE

¶1. On October 10, U Party Secretary General Luis Guillermo Giraldo announced that the Party would seek to amend the constitution to allow President Uribe to run for a third term in 2010 presidential elections. In a Senate session hosted by the U Party to discuss its platform, Giraldo said "no military would change their general in the midst of winning the battle." U Party officials said that after the October 28 local elections, they will start a campaign to collect signatures to amend the constitution. Polls show over 50% of Colombians would support another term for Uribe.

¶2. Uribe did not support the measure. Secretary of the Presidency Bernardo Moreno told us Uribe would not run again, noting the huge institutional personal, and political costs that would be involved. He predicted pressure for Uribe to stand again would dissipate as other candidates officially declare their candidacies. Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told the press Uribe "had no interest" in pursuing the U Party proposal, and was interested only in finishing his second term. Gaviria told us the U Party--although created to support Uribe's 2006 presidential campaign--no longer represents the Casa de Narino's interests. Still, Uribe did not personally address the issue.

¶3. There is strong opposition within both the U Party and from other coalition and opposition parties for another reelection effort. Former Defense Minister and U Party Senator Martha Lucia Ramirez said she opposed the measure. Conservative Party leader Senator Efraim Cepeda rejected the proposal and said the Conservatives planned to run their own candidate in 2010. Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras told us he plans to run for president, and would oppose a third Uribe term. Leading figures in the opposition Liberal and Polo Democratico Parties also announced their opposition. The U Party alone would not be able to muster the votes needed for the amendment.

¶4. Changing the constitution is not easy, and can be done in three ways. 1) Congress can pass a constitutional change through two separate, consecutive rounds of four debates in one Congressional session (year), with subsequent approval of the change by the Constitutional Court. 2) Congress can call a Constituent Assembly. 3) Signatures can be gathered (equal to five percent of the population) calling for a referendum. Congress and the Constitutional Court must then approve the referendum request. Finally, the change must be approved by 50 percent plus one of voters in the referendum--with a minimum of twenty-five percent of the voting population participating. The U Party suggested the third route.

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